

VZCZCXRO7249
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHLB #0282/01 0710820
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 120820Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4407
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3567
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3770
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000282

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR A A/S WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR MCDERMOTT, SHAPIRO
DOD/OSD FOR FOURNOY, KAHL, AND DALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/08/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MP HARB WITH FELTMAN, SHAPIRO: ELECTION
SECURITY IN SYRIA'S HANDS

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a March 8 meeting with Christian MP Butros Harb, NEA A A/S Feltman, NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa, and the Ambassador heard Harb caution that, while Syria's "style" had changed, it was still involved in Lebanon's electoral processes by selecting candidates, vetting lists, and intimidating voters. Harb said A A/S Feltman's and Shapiro's visit to Lebanon, both before and after traveling to Damascus, was a clear message from the U.S. to Syria about U.S. commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty. Harb noted his personal security remained under threat, but he continued to meet his supporters at his home.

2. (C) Harb emphasized to A A/S Feltman and NSC Senior Director Shapiro that Lebanon's security situation, during the run-up to the election, was wholly dependent on the Syrians. He remarked that expatriates who are considering traveling to Lebanon for the election are also worried about security. He mentioned Syria's desire to see another "national unity" government in Lebanon, so that the country's political processes remained paralyzed. Harb stressed to A A/S Feltman that Lebanon's problems are not only local, but regional and international. He said "Lebanon must survive" until the situation in Syria and Iran changes. Pertaining to an upcoming non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Harb acknowledged the political pressures that would come with membership, but offered no advice on the matter. End summary.

HARB ON SYRIA: WE FEEL THEIR HAND

3. (C) On March 8, NEA Acting A/S Jeffrey Feltman, NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa Dan Shapiro, and the Ambassador, accompanied by the DCM, Pol/Econ Section chief, PolMilOff and senior political LES, met Christian MP Butros Harb at his residence. Harb commended A A/S Feltman and Shapiro for their comprehensive trip to Lebanon. He noted their visit to Lebanon, both before and after traveling to Damascus, was a clear message from the U.S. to Syria about U.S. commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty. It would, however, take more than one trip to make a strong impression on the Syrians, Harb remarked. Harb warned that while Syria wanted

a greater "international role," and to avoid problems with the U.S. or E.U., it still has "its hand" in Lebanon. Harb encouraged the U.S. to remain focused on the region and the PLO-Israeli peace talks.

14. (C) Syria has changed its "style," Harb said, but still exerts its influence on elections by supporting candidates, vetting lists, and intimidating voters. Harb emphasized to A A/S Feltman that a good security situation during the election period was dependent on Syrian action. Harb characterized his personal security situation as "ok," saying he maintained a strict regime of meeting supporters at home and never discussing plans over the phone.

UNITY MEANS PARALYSIS

15. (C) Harb was confident the parliamentary elections would occur on June 7 as scheduled. He believed the one day period would take away the "Hizballah machine's" ability to manipulate outcomes. Should March 14 win, Harb remarked that Syria will push for a "national unity" government in order to continue the current paralysis in the Lebanese government. He was adamant that March 14 would not support the veto power currently afforded the opposition with its blocking third in the cabinet. He denounced the efforts of Syria and Iran to influence the elections, and stressed that "Lebanon must survive" until the situation in Syria and Iran changes.

LEBANON ON UN SECURITY COUNCIL

BEIRUT 00000282 002 OF 002

16. (C) Pertaining to a Lebanon's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Harb noted the political pressures on Lebanon that would come with membership, for example, not being able to oppose UNSC action against Iran, but offered no advice on the matter. A A/S Feltman noted that membership could place Lebanon in voting situations that could "tear it apart politically."

17. (U) NEA Acting Assistant Secretary Jeffrey D. Feltman and NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa Daniel Shapiro have cleared this message.

SISON